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ABSTRACT

With a continuing emphasis on improving student reading achievement across the nation, many elementary educators are exploring the idea of initiating a volunteer reading tutoring program. Although individuals associated with tutoring programs may think about implementation issues, often the focus is on program location, the recruitment and training of tutors, and the selection and scheduling of students--evaluation of a tutoring program is often forgotten. This guide focuses on tutoring through the lens of the national America Reads Challenge initiative, and it takes program implementation to a deeper level by examining volunteer transportation, tutor work ethic, and school expectations. The guide summarizes and synthesizes findings from evaluations and provides introductory information to funders, program coordinators and staff, school administrators, elementary teachers, and tutors about implementing and evaluating a volunteer reading tutoring program. It also provides evaluation results and accompanying conclusions from five America Reads tutoring programs as well as program evaluation recommendations. (Contains 30 notes and 13 tables.) (NKA)

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Introductory Guide for Implementing and Evaluating Volunteer Reading Tutoring Programs

A SERVE *Special Report*

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Introductory Guide for Implementing and Evaluating Volunteer Reading Tutoring Programs

A SERVE *Special Report*

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Improving Learning through Research & Development

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Contents

Executive Summary.....4
Introduction.....5
Description and Evaluation Overview of Tutoring Programs.....7
Program Evaluation.....10
Program Evaluation Conclusions.....20
Program Evaluation Recommendations.....21
Program Implementation Recommendations.....24
Program Implementation Support.....26
References.....27
Project Contact Information.....28

Executive Summary

With a continuing emphasis on improving student reading achievement across the nation, many elementary educators are exploring the idea of initiating a volunteer reading tutoring program. Although individuals associated with tutoring programs may think about implementation issues, often the focus is on program location, the recruitment and training of tutors, and the selection and scheduling of students. Evaluation of a tutoring program is often forgotten.

This guide focuses on tutoring through the lens of the national America Reads Challenge initiative, and it takes program implementation to a deeper level by examining volunteer transportation, tutor work ethic, and school expectations. Also provided are evaluation results and accompanying conclusions from five America Reads tutoring programs and program evaluation recommendations.

Introduction

The America Reads Challenge, a national campaign initiated in 1997, called for a grassroots "citizen army" of parents, teachers, students, senior citizens, and other volunteers to become reading tutors to primary students. Federal monies were also allocated to pay work-study students at designated colleges and universities to serve as tutors.

To ensure the quality of volunteer literacy programs, the U.S. Department of Education set aside several million dollars for tutor training and support. Through the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs), schools and community agencies were invited to form partnerships and apply for funding to start or expand the training component of volunteer reading programs. The proposal guidelines did not require projects to evaluate the impact of tutoring services on student achievement; however, many programs chose to do so.

In September 1998, the following nine southeastern programs each received $50,000 in grant money to be used from October 1998 to March 1999 to build their reading tutoring programs:

- Birmingham READS in Birmingham, Alabama
- Hillsborough Reads in Tampa, Florida
- Miami Reads Tutorial Project in Miami-Dade County, Florida
- Southwest Georgia Regional Training Project based in Albany, Georgia
- City Wide Readers in Atlanta, Georgia
- Mississippi Reads in Jackson, Mississippi
- School Reading Partners in Chapel Hill-Carrboro, North Carolina
- America Reads through Family Literacy in Gastonia, North Carolina
- Reading Soul Mates in Charleston, South Carolina

Of the nine grantees, five went beyond the requirements of the SERVE grant, by collecting program evaluation data during the 1998-99 school year and making the results available to SERVE.[1] No evaluation guidelines were provided, so the designs varied.

The purpose of this guide is to summarize and synthesize findings from these evaluations and to provide introductory information to funders, tutoring program coordinators and staff, school administrators, elementary schoolteachers, and tutors about implementing and evaluating a volunteer reading tutoring program.

The most recent results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirmed that public school children in the southeastern United States are in need of assistance to develop and strengthen basic literacy skills. According to the *NAEP 1998 Reading Report Card for the*

[1] The five projects that provided evaluation data for this report are Hillsborough Reads, the Miami Reads Tutorial Project, Mississippi Reads, Reading Soul Mates, and School Reading Partners. Contact information for each of these projects appears at the end of this report.

Nation and the States,[2] in five of the six states in the SERVE region, both fourth- and eighth-graders performed below the national average on the 1998 NAEP reading assessment.[3]

As Table 1 shows, in the six SERVE states, 38-52% of sampled fourth-graders in the region scored "below basic." Another 30-34% of students were assessed as reading only at the "basic" or partial mastery level. Only 18 to 28% of students in the region scored at the "proficient" level.

Table 1
Percentage of Fourth-Graders within Each NAEP Achievement Level

SERVE States	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Alabama	44	32	19	5
Florida	46	31	18	5
Georgia	45	31	19	5
Mississippi	52	30	15	3
North Carolina	38	34	22	6
South Carolina	45	33	18	4
National Average	**39**	**31**	**23**	**6**

Table 2 tells a similar story about eighth-grade reading levels in the SERVE states, with 38-52% of students scoring below the basic level.

Table 2
Percentage of Eighth-Graders within Each NAEP Achievement Level

SERVE States	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Alabama	34	45	20	1
Florida	35	42	22	1
Georgia	32	43	24	1
Mississippi	39	42	18	1
North Carolina	24	45	29	2
South Carolina	35	43	21	1
National Average	**28**	**41**	**28**	**2**

State-by-state data are not available for the twelfth-grade reading assessment, although data have been compiled for four broad regions of the country: Central, Northeast, Southeast, and West. The SERVE states are a subset of the Southeast as defined for the NAEP.[4] In 1998, twelfth-grade students in the Southeast scored lower than their counterparts in the other three NAEP regions.

The America Reads projects identified in this report all provide tutoring services to primary-grade school children. The preceding data demonstrate that students in the SERVE region fall behind the rest of the nation at an early age. The America Reads projects at SERVE are designed to provide support to struggling young readers in hopes of reversing this trend.

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[2] Donahue, Patricia L., Voelkl, Kristin E., Campbell, Jay R., and Mazzeo, John (March 1999). *NAEP 1998 Report Card for the Nation and States*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Available at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main1998/1999500.pdf.

[3] Of the six states in the SERVE region, only North Carolina performed "at or around the national average."

[4] In addition to the six states in the SERVE region, NAEP results for the Southeast include performance data for Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Description and Evaluation Overview of Tutoring Programs

The five projects that are the subject of this report all share the goal of improving primary students' reading abilities. Each project selects and trains volunteer tutors and then deploys them in schools to work (usually one-on-one) with elementary school students. Most of the projects select and train adult tutors (federal work-study students, AmeriCorps members, and community volunteers), although one project is a peer-tutoring program. Other project variations include the length and focus of initial tutor training, the tutoring curriculum, length and frequency of tutoring sessions, the number of students involved in each tutoring session, the nature of on-site tutor supervision, the availability of in-service training opportunities for tutors, and program evaluation design.

- ***Hillsborough Reads*** is a partnership between the Hillsborough Education Foundation and the Communities in Schools program in Tampa, Florida. The project recruits federal work-study students and community volunteers as tutors. Six additional AmeriCorps members are responsible for training tutors to implement the Building Better Readers curriculum, which was developed by a team of school district and local university reading specialists. All tutors receive two-to-three hours of initial training, and work-study students receive an additional six hours of training. Once on the job, tutors are supervised by an AmeriCorps member, or Team Leader, who works with a designated school coordinator (e.g., a lead teacher or assistant principal) at each school. Extended training is available to all volunteers. While the tutors work mostly with first-, second-, and third-graders, some specially trained Foster Grandparents work with kindergartners. Tutors work one-on-one with their assigned students twice a week for 30 minutes each session. Tutoring takes place outside of regular classroom reading time and is scheduled by the classroom teacher. Fluency, reading strategies, and other language skills are the focus of instruction.

  1998-99 Program Evaluation: Teachers completed a Student Assessment Form (pre and post) on all participating students to document reading achievement on a five-point scale (from 1=unsatisfactory to 5=outstanding). Parents and teachers were surveyed at the end of the school year for their assessment of change in students' reading skills and attitudes toward reading. In a separate experimental study, first- and second-graders experiencing difficulty with reading were randomly assigned to treatment (tutored) and control (non-tutored) groups. First-graders in both groups were tested pre and post using the *Early Reading and Writing Assessment*. Second-graders in both groups were tested pre and post on the *Scholastic Reading Inventory*.

- ***Miami Reads Tutorial Project*** is jointly administered by the Center for Community Involvement at Miami-Dade Community College and by the Miami-Dade County Public Schools Division of Language Arts/Reading. Federal work-study students from the college are recruited to tutor 15-20 hours per week. Before being placed at a school, tutors attend a two-hour orientation and then receive four hours of training in the tutoring curriculum. This curriculum was developed by a team of reading specialists and classroom teachers and is based on the instructional models for Book Buddies and Reading Recovery. At each school, tutors are supervised by a reading coordinator, who selects the appropriate materials for each tutorial session and also is responsible for observing tutors and giving them feedback. In

addition, reading coordinators hold weekly conferences with tutors and first-grade teachers. Tutors also attend two-hour in-service training sessions every six weeks. The project focuses on first-graders who receive 30 minutes of instruction, two-to-three times a week, in their regular classrooms. In every session, tutors cover four steps: rereading familiar material, exploring words and sounds, writing to read, and reading new material.

1998-99 Program Evaluation: Miami Reads received financial support from SERVE during its second year of operation (1998-99). Therefore, the project has evaluation data for two years. Early in the planning stages, project staff identified six indicators of success including (1) improved student achievement in reading and (2) improved student achievement in spelling.[5] To measure improvement in these areas, a basic battery of reading assessments was compiled by reading specialists in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools for use in primary grades tutorial programs. The assessment included tests for alphabet knowledge, concepts of words in print, phonemic awareness and phonics, word recognition, and reading in context. First-graders' reading achievement was evaluated using pre and post measures. School-based personnel (reading coordinators and teachers) and reading tutors also completed surveys that included a few items about impact on student achievement and self-esteem.

- ***Mississippi Reads*** is a service learning partnership of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning in Jackson, Mississippi, and 18 college and university campuses around the state. Tutors include AmeriCorps members, VISTA volunteers, federal work-study students, and other volunteers. In most cases, tutoring sessions take place on the college campus. Campus supervision is usually handled by a combination of AmeriCorps members and elementary school teachers. Trained reading specialists conduct tutor-training sessions at every campus. The program targets second-, third-, and fourth-graders in Level 1 and 2 schools (schools rated low achieving by the state). Participating students receive two one-hour tutorial sessions per week. One-on-one instruction with students is done outside of their regular classroom reading instruction. Tutorial sessions focus on reading comprehension, sight word identification, and word attack skills.

  1998-99 Program Evaluation: The project gathered pretest and posttest reading achievement data from tutored students using the *Basic Reading Inventory*. Also, classroom teachers were surveyed regarding the impact of the project on their students' reading comprehension, sight word identification, and overall academic improvement.

- ***Reading Soul Mates*** is a peer-reading, service-learning program developed by Youth Service Charleston, an independent, non-profit agency in Charleston, South Carolina. Through this program, fourth- and fifth-graders (and occasionally sixth- to eighth-graders) are trained to tutor younger students, usually first- and second-graders. The older students, or *Readers*, attend three 30-minute training sessions a week for three weeks before they are matched with younger students, or *Buddies*. A combination of teachers, volunteers, federal work-study students, and AmeriCorps members match *Readers* and *Buddies* and then facilitate the tutorial sessions. Teachers are encouraged to meet with *Readers* at least once a week to lead them through reflection activities and to provide ongoing tutor training. *Readers* and *Buddies*

[5] Other indicators include stakeholder satisfaction with tutor training, tutoring materials and methods, logistical procedures and tutor performance, and school district assessment and selection of participants.

meet three times a week for 30 minutes each. A typical tutorial session involves reviewing and summarizing material that has already been read, reading new material, answering comprehension questions, and writing in journals.

1998-99 Program Evaluation: The project examined the impact of participation in the tutoring program on the reading ability of both *Readers* (tutors) and *Buddies* (tutees). The reading portion of the *Metropolitan Achievement Test, 7th edition* (MAT7) was used to measure reading ability. First, the evaluation plan focused on grade-by-grade pretest-posttest gains of tutees (grades 1-3) and tutors (grades 4-8). Then a pretest-posttest control group design was used to assess the impact of participation on the reading ability of *Readers* and *Buddies* combined. The spring 1998 (prior to the beginning of the program) and spring 1999 (end of Year 1) scores of students in the treatment and control groups were compared for differences in quartile shifts made by each group. The control group was composed of non-participants who attended the same schools as the *Readers* and *Buddies* in the treatment group.[6] Surveys of classroom teachers, volunteer facilitators, and *Readers* provided additional information about the impact of the tutoring program on participating students.

- ***School Reading Partners*** is operated by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Office of Volunteer Programs in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Volunteer tutors include students at the University of North Carolina and members of the community's Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Tutors attend a two-hour training session to learn more about Reading Recovery (on which the tutoring sessions build) and how to lead children through the materials and activities that the school reading specialists will select for the students. The school reading specialists plan the tutoring sessions and leave instructions and materials for the tutors to follow. District program staff members observe the tutors and provide them with feedback. The program targets kindergartners, first-graders that are in Reading Recovery, and other students who need additional help to continue improving their reading skills. In order for them to have more than one tutoring session a week, each student is assigned multiple tutors who rotate through the week. Each tutor maintains a record of what was accomplished in each session so that the next tutor can pick up where the last one left off. In a typical tutoring session, volunteers introduce and read new books and work through skill-building activities assigned by the reading specialist.

  1998-99 Program Evaluation: Reading assessments were administered to students for placement purposes only. All kindergartners in the district were given the North Carolina K-2 Literacy Assessment. Struggling readers in the first- and second-grades were evaluated using Reading Recovery assessment tools. Other student impact data were collected via a telephone survey of classroom teachers and a focus group with site-based managers.

As indicated above, evaluation of these five projects has varied in terms of research design and measurement of achievement and other impacts. The next section of this report summarizes these variations and related evaluation findings across projects.

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[6] Thirteen schools were involved in the evaluation study. Approximately 15% of the total student population at these schools participated in Reading Soul Mates, which left a sizable number of students from which to select the control group. Criteria for being selected into the control group were not reported.

Program Evaluation

The focus of all the project evaluations overall can be summarized by the following three evaluation questions:

1. Do participating students make significant gains in their reading skills over the course of the program?
2. Do reading levels of participating students increase more than those of non-participating students?
3. Do participating students experience other positive personal or academic impacts as a result of program participation?

An important distinction to make between the evaluation studies is whether tutored students were compared with themselves before and after the program (as in a pretest-posttest design), whether they were compared with non-tutored students at the end of the program (a posttest-only design), or whether tutored and non-tutored students were compared at the beginning and end of the program (a pretest-posttest control group design).

An important distinction to make between the evaluation studies is whether tutored students were compared with themselves before and after the program (as in a pretest-posttest design), whether they were compared with non-tutored students at the end of the program (as in a posttest-only design), or whether tutored and non-tutored students were compared at the beginning and the end of the program (as in a pretest-posttest control group design). The interpretation of results regarding the benefits of the tutoring project in question depends in large measure on the design that is used for the evaluation study. Among the examples reported here, the pretest-posttest control group designs are the strongest for drawing conclusions about the value of one-on-one tutoring programs.

NOTE: Each project designed their own evaluations and produced their own reports. The findings that are synthesized in this report are not the product of a common cross-site evaluation plan. For the most part, results are presented here as they were first reported in the respective evaluation documents. Some findings have been re-formatted for clarity and consistency. Information about the reading scales and sub-scales has been included wherever possible to allow the reader to assess the substantive significance of the reported findings.

Do participating students make significant gains in their reading skills over the course of the program?

Four of the five projects addressed the question of whether participating students improved their reading skills. Of course, students are expected to improve their reading skills in the course of a school year. The following studies assessed how much progress tutored students made while they were in the program. Each study uses a different measure of improvement.

Hillsborough Reads, Florida

To measure gains in reading skills, the project used the Student Assessment Form, which was developed by project staff to document student reading achievement before and after participation in the Hillsborough Reads tutoring program. Classroom teachers were asked (pre and post) to assess students' reading achievement on the following scale: 1=Unsatisfactory,

2=Needs Improvement, 3=Satisfactory, 4=Good, and 5=Outstanding. This five-point scale was tied to benchmark standards for first and second grade.[7]

Forty-five percent of tutored students in grades K-3 increased their reading performance by one Likert-scale point on the Student Assessment Form (see Table 3). Another 17.5% progressed two to four points on this five-point scale. This measure took place during one school year.

Table 3
Hillsborough Reads
Teacher-Rated Improvement of Students' Reading Achievement

Number of Points Improved on 5-Point Scale	Number of Students (n=407)	Percent of Total
0	154	38
1	183	45
2	52	13
3	16	4
4	2	.5

At the end of the school year, a variety of stakeholders—including teachers, parents, and school site coordinators—were surveyed for their feedback and impressions of the tutoring program.

- Ninety-three percent of responding teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Tutored children in my class have made progress that I believe is partially a result of their tutoring sessions."[8]
- All of the project's 12 school site coordinators either agreed or strongly agreed that the Hillsborough Reads tutoring program was making a difference in students' reading achievement.
- One hundred percent of responding parents of tutored students either agreed or strongly agreed that they had seen progress in their child's reading ability over the past year.[9]

Miami Reads Tutorial Project, Florida

The project measured reading improvement using a battery of reading tests that were compiled by the Miami-Dade County Public Schools and recommended for use in America Reads projects at the primary grade level.[10] Tests include Alphabet Knowledge (recognition, sounds, production), Concept of Words in Print, Phonemic Awareness (sound-picture matching, spelling, sound-letter correspondence), Word Recognition (color and number words, pre-primer sight words), and Oral Reading and Comprehension. Table 4 includes the number of points needed to achieve the "Mastery" level on each scale or sub-scale (located in the Reading Assessments column).

In both years of the project, participating first-graders showed statistically significant progress on all measures in the district's basic battery of reading skills assessments. As shown in Table 4,

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[7] For the Year 2 evaluation, project staff members are expanding to a seven-point scale in order to better capture subtle advances that occur while students are still in Level 2, the "needs improvement" stage.

[8] This result is based on a 94% response rate with 87 teachers responding out of 93 surveyed.

[9] These results are based on a 59% response rate with 147 parents responding out of 250 surveyed.

[10] The primary grades reading tests were developed by school district staff, who modeled them after assessments used in other elementary reading programs, including Reading Buddies and Reading Recovery.

participants in the Miami Reads Tutorial Project have made the greatest pre-post gains in phonemic awareness (spelling and letter-sound correspondence sub-scales) and word recognition (number words and pre-primer sight words sub-scales). In Year 2, the next cohort of first-grade tutees also made notable progress in phonemic awareness, word recognition, and oral reading and comprehension. And yet, in spite of large percentage gains in these areas, tutored students are still performing on average below the "mastery" level for first-graders on each of these sub-scales. In the case of the Oral Reading and Comprehension test, students reached only the "minimally adequate" level (10-14) at the end of Year 2.

Table 4
Miami Reads Tutorial Project
Reading Assessment Results of First-Graders
(District-Selected Battery of Reading Assessments)

Reading Assessments	1997-98 (n=1310) Cohort 1		1998-99 (n=1020) Cohort 2	
	Pretest Mean *(std dev)*	Posttest Mean *(std dev)*	Pretest Mean *(std dev)*	Posttest Mean *(std dev)*
Alphabet Knowledge:				
Lower case letters [mastery=20/26]	18.23 *(7.72)*	24.74* *(3.63)*	18.68 *(7.77)*	24.60* *(3.67)*
Upper case letters [mastery=20/26]	18.66 *(7.80)*	25.05* *(8.29)*	19.45 *(7.54)*	24.91* *(6.45)*
Letters Produced [mastery=20/26]	17.81 *(8.41)*	24.27* *(4.43)*	16.85 *(8.54)*	23.76* *(5.23)*
Concept of Word in Print:				
Words in print [mastery=4/5]	2.83 *(1.85)*	4.64* *(1.19)*	3.20 *(3.25)*	4.71* *(1.79)*
Phonemic Awareness:				
Sound-picture matching [mastery=6/8]	5.72 *(3.33)*	7.60* *(1.22)*	6.22 *(4.24)*	7.62* *(1.20)*
Spelling [mastery=20/26]	5.96 *(6.68)*	16.28* *(7.74)*	8.51 *(8.06)*	17.57* *(6.60)*
Sound-letter correspondence [mastery=16/20]	3.54 *(3.50)*	7.65* *(3.14)*	7.87 *(6.73)*	16.79* *(4.71)*
Word Recognition:				
Color words [mastery=9/11]	5.52 *(3.89)*	9.51* *(2.83)*	5.47 *(3.82)*	9.39* *(3.04)*
Number words [mastery=9/11]	4.43 *(4.23)*	9.60* *(4.16)*	4.42 *(3.99)*	8.93* (3.28)
Pre-primer sight words [mastery=29/36]	4.04 *(5.37)*	14.83* *(6.56)*	4.49 *(6.28)*	15.65* *(7.76)*
Oral Reading and Comprehension:				
Benchmark book level [proficient=18-20]	1.35 *(2.72)*	2.06* *(1.04)*	4.82 *(6.05)*	11.56* *(6.48)*

*All pretest-posttest differences in Years 1 and 2 are statistically significant at the p=.001 level.

Mississippi Reads

The project assessed reading improvement via pretest-posttest administrations of the *Basic Reading Inventory* (BRI).[11] The BRI is an informal reading assessment that includes grade-level word lists and reading passages. Each passage is followed by comprehension questions regarding topic, facts, inference, evaluation, and vocabulary.[12] Teachers also completed surveys rating individual student's improvement in reading comprehension and sight word recognition.

Table 5 shows results for 552 participating second-, third-, and fourth-graders from 32 elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. At each of these schools, the *Basic Reading Inventory* was administered either by an AmeriCorps member or classroom teacher.[13] At the end of the school year, 85% of tutored students showed gains of one or more reading grade levels. The other 15% showed no change.[14]

Table 5
Mississippi Reads
Pre/post Reading Level Increases of Tutored Students
(*Basic Reading Inventory*)

Reading Level Increases	Percent of Tutored Students
0	15
1	24
2	26
3	19
4	10
5+	6

Based on the ratings of their regular classroom teachers, close to half (45-49%) of tutored students made "significant" to "tremendous" progress in reading comprehension and sight word identification (see Table 6). Forty-two percent achieved "partial" improvement in these skill areas, and 9-13% showed little to no improvement.[15]

Table 6
Mississippi Reads
Teacher Ratings of Improvement in Reading Skills

Reading Skills	Improvement in Reading Skills (Percent Responding)			
	Tremendous	Significant	Partial	Little or no
Reading comprehension	8	37	42	13
Sight word identification	10	39	42	9

[11] The *Basic Reading Inventory* (BRI) was developed by Dr. Jerry Johns and is published by Kendall/Hunt.
[12] Project staff members are concerned that the BRI may inflate measured reading levels. They plan to use a different reading assessment instrument in the future.
[13] There are no strict guidelines for administering the test. A few of the teachers who administered the test to Mississippi Reads participants already had some experience with the BRI. A few other teachers and all the AmeriCorps volunteers received some training to administer the test, but this was not required of all teachers who tested students for program eligibility.
[14] The Mississippi Reads model called for students to receive two hours of tutoring each week for 30-32 weeks (depending on the school).
[15] The number of teachers doing the rating was not available; however, ratings were received for 491 students.

Reading Soul Mates, South Carolina

To assess growth in peer-tutors' (*Readers*, grades 4-8) and tutees' (*Buddies*, grades 1-3) reading ability, the project compared students' year-to-year reading test results on the *Metropolitan Achievement Test* (MAT7). The MAT7, a nationally normed assessment, is administered by the Charleston County Public Schools every spring. Results on the MAT7 are expressed as national percentile ranks.

Table 7 presents average MAT7 reading scores by grade for *Buddies* and *Readers* at 13 Charleston County schools. Among the *Buddies*, first-graders showed by far the greatest improvement, jumping from the 29th percentile nationally in 1998 to the 45th percentile as second-graders in 1999. Third-graders also improved their national percentile rankings on the MAT7, going from the 65th percentile in 1998 to the 72nd percentile as fourth-graders in 1999. However, the majority of *Buddies*, 163 second-graders, dropped from the 50th percentile (the national average) to the 42nd percentile. Percentile ranks for the fourth-grade *Readers* also dropped off between fourth and fifth grade. *Readers* who were in grades 5-8 in 1998 experienced smaller negative changes in their national percentile ranks from one grade to the next.[16]

Table 7
Reading Soul Mates
Change in Tutees' and Tutors' Average National Percentile Ranks, 1998-1999
(Metropolitan Achievement Test, 7th Edition)

Grade	No. of Tutees	Average MAT7 percentile rank 1998	No. of Tutees	Average MAT7 percentile rank 1999	Reading Percentile Gain
1	10	29.0	10	45.0	+16.0
2	163	49.9	163	41.7	-8.2
3	21	65.4	21	71.6	+6.2

Summary: To determine whether participating students made progress in their reading ability, three of the four projects used some form of pretest-posttest skills test. The fourth project relied on teachers' assessments of progress and found varying degrees of improvement in nearly two-thirds of the tutored students. These studies reported either modest to substantial gains in specific skill areas or large percentages of tutored students advancing one or more levels of the reading assessment used. In the peer-tutoring program, peer-tutors (grades 4-8) did not improve their reading skills over the course of the program. Other findings relied on the judgments of a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, site coordinators, and/or parents. Responding stakeholders generally found that participating students' reading skills had improved, although response rates on stakeholder surveys were very low. In one study, teachers and site coordinators attributed progress *in part* to students' involvement in the America Reads project.

Do reading levels of participating students increase more than those of non-participating students?

[16] In the absence of standard deviations for the reported means (averages), it was not possible to assess the statistical significance of these findings.

Two of the SERVE-sponsored America Reads projects, Hillsborough Reads and Reading Soul Mates, used a pretest-posttest control group design to determine whether participants' reading skills improved more than those of non-participants. Their results are summarized in the following sections.

Hillsborough Reads, Florida

An experimental study was conducted by an external evaluator to compare the performance of tutored and non-tutored first- and second-graders on several different measures, including the *Early Reading and Writing Assessment*[17] (first-graders, pre and post) and the *Scholastic Reading Inventory*[18] (second-graders, pre and post). All first-graders at School A and all second-graders at School B were pre-tested using the *Early Reading and Writing Assessment* and the *Scholastic Reading Inventory*, respectively. Students in the targeted score-range, who also met other academic and behavioral criteria, were randomly assigned to treatment (tutored) and control (non-tutored) groups. By the time of the final analyses, the treatment group contained 46 first-graders and 33 second-graders; the control group included 37 first-graders and 29 second-graders.[19] Average tutoring time was 19.87 hours for first-graders over a 20-week period and 15.46 hours for second-graders over a 15-week period.[20]

The experimental study report cites statistically significant differences between the posttest means of tutored and non-tutored first-graders on two scale scores: Concepts about Print and Story Retelling (see Table 8). These results are based on an analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA), which controlled for differences in the pretest means of the tutored and non-tutored first-graders. No statistically significant findings were reported for the other scale scores (Writing and Phonemic Awareness) or for the Total Composite scores.

Table 8
Hillsborough Reads
Analysis of Co-Variance of First-Graders' Reading Scale Scores, 1998-99
(*Early Reading and Writing Assessment*)

Scales	Tutored (n=46)		Non-Tutored (n=37)		ANCOVA Results
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	F (*p*)
Concepts about Print	5.75	7.30	6.00	6.68	**4.31 (<.04)**
Story Retelling	3.43	4.46	3.05	3.84	**4.10 (<.05)**

[17] The *Early Reading and Writing Assessment*, published by Scholastic in 1996 (now out of print), is an informal test of concepts about print, story retelling, writing, and phonemic awareness. The Total Composite score and sub-scores represent the number of correct items, but the total number of items was not reported.

[18] The *Scholastic Reading Inventory*, available from Scholastic, is based on the Lexile Framework for Reading, which matches students' reading and comprehension skills with texts of established difficulty levels. Lexile levels do not translate to specific graded reading levels.

[19] The student populations in School A and School B were highly mobile. For this reason, the Experimental Study samples at these schools experienced fairly high attrition (22% at School A and 34% at School B).

[20] There is a great deal of spread in the figures for mean hours of tutoring. Tutoring hours for the first-graders in this study ranged from 4 to 40 hours over 20 weeks. For second-graders, tutoring time ranged from 6 to 25 hours over 15 weeks. The Hillsborough Reads project staff plans to focus future evaluation efforts on students who receive the most consistent ("substantial, sustained") tutoring services.

Writing	2.54	3.48	2.49	3.57	1.30 (n.s.)
Phonemic awareness	11.11	18.13	11.05	17.20	.000 (n.s.)
Total Composite[21]	82.97	100.89	78.24	98.38	2.21 (n.s.)

NOTE: "n.s." indicates that the F-statistic is not significant at the $p<.05$ level.

The *Scholastic Reading Inventory* was administered pre and post to second-graders in the experimental study. In order to fairly assess the difference in performance of tutored and non-tutored students, mean posttest Lexile scores for the two groups were adjusted by pretest Lexile scores using ANCOVA. The ANCOVA results (see Table 9) indicate that tutored second-graders made significantly greater gains on the *Scholastic Reading Inventory* than their non-tutored counterparts.

Table 9
Hillsborough Reads
Analysis of Co-Variance of Second-Graders' Lexile Scores, 1998-99
(*Scholastic Reading Inventory*)

Score	Tutored (n=33)		Non-tutored (n=30)[22]		ANCOVA Results
	Pre-Lexile (*std dev*)	Post-Lexile (*std dev*)	Pre-Lexile (*std dev*)	Post-Lexile (*std dev*)	F (*p*)
Lexile Reading Levels	73.79 *(84.72)*	275.45 *(188.33)*	103.97 *(174.25)*	254.83 *(209.06)*	47.97 *(<.001)*

At the beginning of the tutoring program, all second-graders in the experimental study were reading at or below first-grade level on the *Scholastic Reading Inventory*. By the school year's end, 24% of tutored students (8 out of 33) were reading on grade level (third-grade level), while only 7% of non-tutored students (2 out of 29) had attained this level (see Table 10).[23]

Table 10
Hillsborough Reads
Number of Tutored and Non-Tutored Second-Graders Reading at Each Grade Level, 1998-99
(*Scholastic Reading Inventory*)

Grade Level	Tutored (n=33)		Non-Tutored (n=29)	
	Pre-Lexile	Post-Lexile	Pre-Lexile	Post-Lexile
Pre-primer	27	11	23	11
First	6	7	6	7
Second	0	7	0	9
Third	0	8	0	2

[21] Since scale scores do not sum to the Total Composite scores, it appears that the Total Composites are based on performance on one or more additional scales besides those reported.

[22] The non-tutored group appears to include an outlier that inflates the group's pre-Lexile and post-Lexile means. Without access to the raw data, it is not clear how this outlier affects the ANCOVA results in Table 9.

[23] Levels in the Lexile Framework used to score the *Scholastic Reading Inventory* do not actually correspond to specific grade levels; rather, they correspond to the reading comprehension levels of specific texts. It appears, therefore, that the project adopted its own grade-level benchmarks for Lexile levels.

Reading Soul Mates, South Carolina

The performance of peer-tutors (*Readers*) and tutees (*Buddies*) on the *Metropolitan Achievement Test* (MAT7) was assessed relative to that of the total population of students at their respective schools. Program participants were compared to all students on the basis of the distribution of MAT7 scores into quartiles. Quartile distributions for 1998 and 1999 were cross-tabulated to look for movement into higher quartiles from the 1998 starting point. Overall, quartile distributions for participants and all students were very similar. An equal majority of students in both groups (63%) held steady in the same quartile from one year to the next. Fifteen percent of participants versus 17% of all students moved ahead one or more quartiles; while 23% of participants versus 21% of all students slipped one or more quartiles between 1998 and 1999.[24]

Table 11
Reading Soul Mates
Quartile Shifts in Reading Scores of Participants V. Non-Participants, 1998-1999
(*Metropolitan Achievement Test, 7th Edition*)

Sample	Loss (neg. shift in quartile)	Same Quartile (1998 and 1999)	Gain (pos. shift in quartile)
Participants - *Readers* & *Buddies* (n=584)	23	63	15
All students - participants and non-participants (n=4469)	21	63	17

Summary: One of the two control group studies, Hillsborough Reads, separated first- and second-graders in the data collection and analysis phases of the evaluation. The results indicated that tutored first-graders gained more than non-tutored first-graders in a few specific skill areas. Among second-graders, tutored students made significantly greater gains than non-tutored students in Lexile reading scores. The other control group study of Reading Soul Mates combined peer tutors (grades 4-8) and tutees (grades 1-3) in the treatment and control groups. The analysis was limited to a pre/post comparison of how tutors and tutees versus non-tutored students were distributed across reading score quartiles. No significant differences were evident in the two distributions.

Do participating students experience other positive personal or academic impacts as a result of program participation?

Other personal and academic impacts identified by the five projects include improved attitudes toward reading and school, general academic progress, improved social skills, improved self-esteem, increased volunteerism, and changed aspirations for the future.

Hillsborough Reads, Florida

At the end of the school year, parents of participating first- and second-graders were surveyed. All of those who responded to the survey (147 out of 250) either agreed or strongly agreed that they had seen positive change in their child's attitude toward reading and/or school.

[24] Separate results comparing peer-tutors (*Readers*) with all fourth- to eighth-graders and tutees (*Buddies*) with all first- through third-graders were not reported. Thus, it is not possible to assess how each group fared on its own.

Miami Reads Tutorial Project, Florida

For two consecutive years, school-based personnel (reading coordinators and teachers) gave the Miami Reads Tutorial Project high ratings for impact on students' academic achievement and self-esteem. Starting with a five-point Likert scale, the distribution of ratings was translated into a mean for each item (see Table 12).

Table 12
Miami Reads Tutorial Project
Teachers' and Reading Coordinators' Ratings of Program Impact on Students

Survey Items [Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strong agree]	1997-98 (n=143) Mean (std dev)	1998-99 (n=166) Mean (std dev)
The America Reads program had a strong impact on the academic achievement of my students.	4.01 (1.19)	4.23 (.90)
The America Reads program had a strong impact on the self-esteem of my students.	4.23 (1.11)	4.43 (.90)

Reading tutors have also given the project high ratings for impact on students' academic achievement and self-esteem (see Table 13).

Table 13
Miami Reads Tutorial Project
Tutors' Ratings of Program Impact on Students

Survey Items [Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strong agree]	1997-98 (n=143) Mean (std dev)	1998-99 (n=166) Mean (std dev)
The America Reads program had a strong impact on the academic achievement of the children I tutored.	4.68 (.50)	4.74 (.47)
The America Reads program had a strong impact on the self-esteem of the children I tutored.	4.71 (.50)	4.78 (.45)

Mississippi Reads

Teachers were asked to rate each individual student's overall academic improvement over the course of the tutoring sessions.[25] According to their regular classroom teachers, most students made at least partial improvement in their overall academic performance. Teachers reported that 43% of tutored students had shown "significant" or "tremendous" improvement. Partial improvement was reported for 46% of tutored students. Eleven percent of participants showed little or no improvement in their overall academic performance.

Reading Soul Mates, South Carolina

Teachers, adult volunteers, and *Readers* (tutors) were surveyed to determine the impact of the RSM program on its academic, social, and civic goals. Response rates were low.[26] What follows is a brief summary of the kinds of observations made by each group:

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[25] The number of teachers doing the rating was not available; however, ratings were received for 491students.

[26] Out of about 26 *Buddy* teachers (grades 1-3), three responded; these three teachers were responsible for 48 (out of 310) *Buddies*. Six out of approximately 26 *Reader* teachers (grades 4-8) responded; these six teachers were responsible for 206 (out of 318) *Readers*. Three out of 25 AmeriCorps members responded to program surveys. And out of 318 *Readers*, 107 responded to the pre-survey, and 88 responded to the post-survey.

- About the *Buddies*: Two of three teachers (grades 1-3) who returned surveys saw improvement in the *Buddies'* social skills, such as learning to be patient, listening better, communicating more, and taking pride in their work.
- About the *Readers*: Five of six responding teachers (grades 4-8) acknowledged improvement in social skills, especially that the Readers' sense of responsibility, maturity and communication skills had improved. In a shorter follow-up survey, other teachers of *Readers* (number unknown) estimated that 90-98% of their students had achieved the academic, social, and civic goals of the RSM program. Three AmeriCorps members reported that the *Readers'* social skills had improved.
- According to the *Readers* themselves: There was little change from pre to post in terms of the highest level of school the students plan to complete; the modal response (81-85%) was "graduate from college/technical training." The percentage of students interested in teaching as a career doubled from 9 to 18%. There was a 10% increase in the number of *Readers* who recognized their own leadership capacity. Finally, the number of *Readers* who reported volunteering every day increased from 17 to 22%, while the number who said they never volunteered decreased from 36 to 31%.

School Reading Partners, North Carolina

A group of classroom teachers, who were interviewed by telephone, all reported enthusiastically that their students had benefited from participation in School Reading Partners. Most of them identified the social aspect of the one-on-one sessions—rather than any academic gains—as having been most salient for their students. One teacher, however, did express the belief that the tutoring sessions helped students by providing a good review of the materials that also were used in the Reading Recovery program.

In a focus group setting, site-based managers noted both social and academic benefits for students of one-on-one attention from tutors. According to the site-based managers, the children "feel special" and "gain the opportunity to form a trusting relationship with an adult." They also noted that volunteers serve as positive role models for the children they tutor. Among the academic benefits cited in the focus group were improvement in reading skill levels, spending more time-on-task, having more opportunities for language development as a result of interacting with an adult, and having opportunities to generalize the skills they have learned in the classroom. In particular, the site-based managers noted that kindergartners, ESL, and Reading Recovery students appeared to benefit the most from the tutoring program.

Summary: The studies summarized above relied on the judgments of school personnel, parents, adult tutors, and peer-tutors to assess a variety of other impacts on students besides improved reading skills. In most cases, the response rates were low, so the results should be viewed cautiously. Suffice it to say that the results of these studies suggest a number of other possible impacts (e.g., general academic progress, improved self-esteem) that might be studied more rigorously in the future. In the case of peer-tutoring programs, the peer-tutors' social skills and educational aspirations might also be affected by participation in these programs.

Program Evaluation Conclusions

From the evaluations of the five America Reads projects, we have learned the following:

Do participating students make significant gains in their reading skills over the course of the program?

In most cases, tutored students continued to make progress in reading while they were in the tutoring programs. Of the four projects that looked at pretest-posttest differences on some form of quantitative measure (staff-developed scale, standard battery of reading assessments, informal reading inventory, or standardized reading test), three of them indicated that tutored students' reading skills increased while they were in the program. In essence, this means that students were not held back by the projects. It does not mean that the projects were responsible for gains in achievement or that there were additional gains made by the tutees.

Largely through surveys of parents, teachers, and sometimes tutors, each of the five projects was able to report that students achieved something positive (other than higher test scores) during the school year in which they were tutored. Their accomplishments included improved attitudes toward reading and/or school, overall academic improvement, higher self-esteem, and better social skills.

Do reading levels of participating students increase more than those of non-participating students?

Two of the five projects used a pretest-posttest control group design to compare the reading achievement of tutored and non-tutored students. Of the two studies, only one provides evidence in support of the positive impact of volunteer tutoring programs. The other study concludes that there are no differences between participants and non-participants.

Do participating students experience other positive personal or academic impacts as a result of program participation?

Largely through surveys of parents, teachers, and sometimes tutors, each of the five projects was able to report that students achieved something positive (other than higher test scores) during the school year in which they were tutored. Their accomplishments included improved attitudes toward reading and/or school, overall academic improvement, higher self-esteem, and better social skills. In the one peer-tutoring project, at the end of the school year, a greater percentage of peer-tutors had expressed interest in teaching as a career, had volunteered in their communities, and saw themselves as leaders compared to where they stood on these issues at the beginning of the year. Sometimes survey questions in these studies were phrased to link positive attitudes and behaviors to participation in the tutoring programs, but not always. In any case, results from three of the five studies were based on low response rates and/or sample sizes and are, therefore, suggestive at best.

Program Evaluation Recommendations

Evaluation is often as much an art as it is a science. One of the benefits of synthesizing individual project evaluations is to identify fresh and "artful" ideas for addressing common questions across projects. The following suggestions include some of the best evaluation practices currently in use by the SERVE-sponsored America Reads projects.

Future evaluations of America Reads projects should include design comparisons that enable projects to make clear statements about their value for helping students learn to read. Two of the studies reviewed here used pretest-posttest control groups. Both of these studies had the "luxury" of assigning students to the tutored and non-tutored groups because there were more eligible students than tutors in the program. Logistical and cost factors often prohibit this kind of evaluation. When it isn't possible to randomly select a control group, there are other kinds of comparisons that can be made, including the following suggestions:

- ***Matched Comparison Groups*** - Find a similar school that isn't already participating in your project. Urban/rural/suburban location and student demographics are two common factors used to identify similar schools. Ask the principal to allow you to collect pretest and posttest data from a group of students who meet the criteria for participation in your program. After selecting students based on program eligibility, match participants and non-participants on specific relevant criteria, such as standardized test scores and free lunch status. This kind of matched comparison group is often the next best thing to a randomized control group.
- ***Dosage Effects*** - Depending on the reliability of tutors and other program implementation factors, students don't always receive the same amount of tutoring. While regrettable, this situation actually provides the opportunity to make another kind of comparison—between students who receive a low level of tutoring (e.g., less than 10 hours during the school year) and those who receive a high level (e.g., more than 50 hours a year). For example, you could calculate pretest-posttest gains for the two groups (one with a low number of tutoring hours and the other with a high number of tutoring hours) and compare the means and standard deviations of the two groups. A more sophisticated analyst might make use of regression or analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) techniques to calculate the effect of an increasing amount of tutoring (e.g., 1-60+ hours) on student achievement while controlling or adjusting for pretest performance. In this case, a positive result would indicate that the more tutoring a student has, the better he or she scores on the reading assessment.
- ***Performance Targets*** - Another kind of comparison is between participants' performance and a set of well-crafted, validated benchmarks. Experienced educators should be able to review the past performance of different cohorts of students (who did not receive tutoring services) and determine a reasonable and challenging level of gain for students who do receive tutoring services. The point is to be able to say that non-tutored students (who match your program's eligibility criteria) typically perform at Level A by year's end, but tutored students performed at Levels B or C or D at the end of the school year.
- ***Stakeholder Attribution*** - In the absence of other more "objective" forms of comparison, you should at least ask parents, teachers, and other stakeholders to reflect on the degree to which (in their opinions) program participation influenced reading improvement. This usually involves a two-stage question. First, you ask stakeholders and other observers whether they saw any improvement on some specific dimension of reading that your program is designed

to address (e.g., fluency and expression, comprehension, spelling, self-confidence about reading, etc.). Then you ask them to indicate *whether* improvement was related to project participation (e.g., yes, no, I don't know) or to what degree was the project responsible for the improvement they observed (e.g., not at all, somewhat, a lot). If possible, have these observers answer the question for individual students, as opposed to participating students in general.

Other recommendations include (1) selecting a few key questions and finding multiple (two or more) sources of data to address each one, (2) encouraging a high proportion of respondents to return surveys, and (3) reporting on the substantive, as well as the statistical, significance of results.

Another strategy that works well with some groups is to provide tangible incentives for responding. If you can't afford to send something to every respondent, you can award "prizes" to the first few people who respond. For teachers, you might award a set of instructional materials for their classrooms. Parents might respond well to a gift certificate at a local children's bookstore. Be creative and, whenever possible, seek donated prizes.

- ***Triangulating Evidence*** - The most convincing evaluation findings are those based on multiple sources of evidence. "Triangulation" literally means bringing three or more pieces of evidence to bear on a question. In small projects, this level of attention to any single indicator is not realistic. However, it is important to seek at least one other source of support for your findings. Some measures can stand on their own pretty effectively—such as a valid and reliable test of reading achievement. But softer measures, like participant attitude surveys or self-reports of reading improvement, should be supplemented with other perspectives. For example, teachers and parents can also be asked to report on changes they have observed in students' reading attitudes and behaviors. The point is to not rely on one single source of evidence when you are making statements about specific aspects of project impact.
- ***Raising Survey Response Rates*** - With all of the requests for information that the average citizen gets nowadays, it is important to set aside time and other resources to make sure that your target audience responds to your survey. There are a number of strategies for doing this. For example, automatically send everyone a "thank you"/reminder postcard shortly before the survey due date. Randomly select a small sample (10-20%) of potential respondents, call them on the phone, and go through the survey with them. Another strategy that works well with some groups is to provide tangible incentives for responding. If you can't afford to send something to every respondent, you can award "prizes" to the first few people who respond. For teachers, you might award a set of instructional materials for their classrooms. Parents might respond well to a gift certificate at a local children's bookstore. Be creative and, whenever possible, seek donated prizes.
- ***Reporting Substantive Significance*** - Oftentimes, studies report statistical significance but do not explain what the numbers really mean. The fact is that a statistically significant result may not indicate meaningful change. Take for example the following scale for grade-level reading improvement: 1-4=pre-primer, 5-8=first grade, 9-12=second grade, and 13-16=third grade. The goal of your program is to help students read independently and well at each grade level. However, you recognize that some students start off at too low a level to realistically achieve this in a year. So you stipulate that, wherever they start, your participants

will achieve at least one grade-level increase while they are in the program. In analyzing results for a group of second-graders, you find that the group mean is 5 on the pretest at the beginning of second grade and 7 on the posttest at the end of the school year. Given a large and stable-enough sample, this two-point increase may be statistically significant. After all, a statistically significant difference really only means that the difference between test scores is not zero.[27] But the bottom line is that your students have improved their reading by only half of a grade level and are still reading on the first-grade level to boot. In such a case, this two-point increase is not *substantively* significant. On the other hand, you may also get results that appear to be very meaningful in terms of the scale you are using, but are not statistically significant due to a small sample and wide variation in scores. For this reason, it is important to consider both substantive and statistical significance when interpreting your results.

Some measures can stand on their own pretty effectively—such as a valid and reliable test of reading achievement. But softer measures, like participant attitude surveys or self-reports of reading improvement, should be supplemented with other perspectives.

[27] Put another way, the absolute value of the difference between group means (pretest v. posttest) is greater than zero.

Program Implementation Recommendations

Past research indicates that volunteer tutoring programs can have a positive impact on students' reading ability:

- In a study of the Howard Street Tutoring Program in Chicago, participating second- and third-graders achieved greater gains than non-participants on all measures in a battery of word recognition, spelling, and reading tests. Participants were tutored an average of 50 hours each by adult volunteers.
- After a year of tutoring by adult volunteers, a sample of participants in the now-defunct Dade County School Volunteer Development Project (Florida) made greater gains than non-participants on the *Metropolitan Achievement Test*.

In a meta-analysis of findings for peer-tutoring programs in reading and mathematics, peer-tutors and tutees scored higher than non-participating control groups in 52 out of 65 studies on quantitative measures of achievement (Cohen et al., 1982).

Both of these studies used a pretest-posttest control group design, with students being randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups.[28] Peer-tutoring programs have achieved similar results. In a meta-analysis of findings for peer-tutoring programs in reading and mathematics, peer-tutors and tutees scored higher than non-participating control groups in 52 out of 65 studies on quantitative measures of achievement.[29]

The America Reads projects in the SERVE region have been designed to incorporate many of the components of promising and proven programs, such as training and feedback for tutors, structured lesson plans for tutors to follow, and frequent (2-3 times a week) tutoring sessions.[30] If previous evaluations demonstrate the effectiveness of volunteer tutoring programs, and if the SERVE programs include components that are known to be effective, the next step is to ensure that these components are implemented *well*. The America Reads projects at SERVE have already devoted careful attention to developing and revising their training components. For some projects, the next step is to refine program implementation.

In focus group discussions with SERVE staff in November 1998, America Reads project coordinators from the nine funded sites identified a number of "challenges" which affect the implementation of their tutoring components. Some of these challenges have also been identified by the evaluators who studied the projects.

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[28] Wasik, Barbara A. (1997). *Volunteer Tutoring Programs: A Review of Research on Achievement Outcomes* (Report No. 14). Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk [available at http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/Reports/].

[29] The results for mathematics tutor programs were slightly stronger than those for reading tutor programs. See Cohen, Peter A., Kulik, James A., and Kulik, Chen-Li S. (1982). "Educational Outcomes of Tutoring: A Meta-analysis of Findings." *American Educational Research Journal*, 19 (2), pp.237-248.

[30] For more on the components of effective programs, see Potter, Jana; Blankenship, Judy; and Carlsmith, Laura (1999). *So That Every Child Can Read: A Review of Effective and Promising Practices in Volunteer Reading Tutoring Programs*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. See Also Wasik, Barbara A. (1998). "Using Volunteers as Reading Tutors: Guidelines for Successful Practices." *The Reading Teacher*, 51 (7), pp. 562-570.

- ***Tutor Transportation*** - Work-study students typically don't have their own transportation; in fact, they may even be prohibited from having a car on campus if they receive federal work-study funds. Some schools are located close to college campuses, but the schools usually in greatest need of assistance are usually more isolated. In such cases, even public transportation is not available to get tutors to their assigned schools on time.
- ***Volunteer Work Ethic*** - The tutoring job is the first paid work for some work-study students who don't yet have the maturity or sense of responsibility to show up on time and conduct themselves in a professional way. Projects want to set standards like "Show up or lose the job," but they don't feel they can afford to do this once the tutors have been trained. So they feel like they have to relax their standards and be happy with whatever time the tutors do put in.
- ***School Expectations*** - Schools expect too much of the volunteers, so project coordinators have to be clear about what the schools can expect. One coordinator tries to be as clear as possible during initial meetings with school staff: "We have to go back and say to [school people, 'The volunteers are] learning to meet [students'] needs, but they cannot fulfill the primary needs of your school system.' And I always have to say, 'We are supplementing and reinforcing what you're doing. We're not trying to take the place of a certified professional. We're just doing our part. This is what we bring to the table.'"
- ***Resistance to Change*** - It is very difficult to be a change agent in communities that are not used to change. Especially if you are not a native of that community, you have to be very patient. One coordinator said, "We have to be sure that we back off and give them an opportunity to think about their own needs, especially in rural areas.... So, the best thing to do is just to wait and let them conceptualize it, and meet and greet and answer questions, and be very patient with them until they're able to understand that you're not somebody who's coming in to belittle them because their students cannot read as well as everybody else in the whole wide world."
- ***Quality Control and Participant Autonomy*** - Some coordinators find it difficult to ensure that schools adhere to a specific model when projects are geographically spread out: "It's finding a balance between micro-managing or identifying and implementing a model and allowing for creativity and freedom.... We have to identify a framework, then allow people to build their model from that framework."
- ***Participant Buy-In*** - Initial buy-in is, of course, important at the beginning of the program. But project coordinators also need to pay some attention to bringing along new district administrators, principals, and teachers as they enter the picture. In the case of a new district-level reading specialist, one coordinator noted, "We can't move forward much without her leadership," but this is a challenge when new personnel are also trying to learn about all the other programs for which they are responsible.

Tutoring project coordinators must clearly explain to school staff:

"We're supplementing and reinforcing what you're doing. We're not trying to take the place of a certified professional. We're just doing our part."

Addressing these challenges and other program implementation issues will require a mix of technical assistance, creativity, and funding—and project coordinators are looking to SERVE for support.

Program Implementation Support

Project coordinators reported being pleased to have opportunities through SERVE to network with each other and share ideas. In addition, they requested the following kinds of support:

- Commendation letters from SERVE to high-level administrators at the projects' host institutions, "...I think sometimes with our program we're better known around the country than we are within our own institution."
- Press releases from SERVE to local media that put the local America Reads effort into the regional and national contexts for improving literacy: "...what it means to the citizens of this country and how [we're] a part of it."
- Send SERVE staff to the projects for site visits that generate visibility for the projects.
- Publicize what the nine grant-funded projects are doing in high-quality reports so that "other people who didn't get the grant at least get the information out of this."
- Create a document modeled on *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* that addresses "Best Practices" supported by evaluation results among programs that are using volunteers for literacy instruction.
- Present findings about the SERVE-funded projects at regional and national meetings concerning volunteerism and service learning: "SERVE can apply to present it, and we can all come and help."
- Continue to hold meetings that bring together a diverse group of people, from "community-based organizations, to state, to university-oriented, to school-site oriented."
- Create a special travel fund that enables project coordinators to visit each other and see first-hand what's going on in other projects.
- Support a third-party evaluation for the purpose of helping coordinators improve their projects and generate information that will help them get additional funding.

SERVE has already responded to a number of these requests since the project coordinator focus groups were conducted. Project support has included making presentations about the America Reads Challenge grant projects at regional and national meetings, continuing to host networking and information-sharing meetings for diverse project partners, and supporting this introductory guide to implementing and evaluating America Reads tutoring programs.

To the Lab's credit, SERVE has already responded to a number of these requests since the project coordinator focus groups were conducted. Project support has included making presentations about the America Reads Challenge grant projects at regional and national meetings, continuing to host networking and information sharing meetings for diverse project partners, and supporting this introductory guide to implementing and evaluating America Reads tutoring programs.

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